



# **SUMMARY OF TOWN HALL**

## **“THE PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION AND GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION”**

### **OF THE GLOBAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**Sunday, February 9, 2020**

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This Town Hall was held to provide information on a proposal that will be discussed at the upcoming General Conference of the United Methodist Church in May. There are no decisions or votes that need to be taken by our congregation.

#### **An Overview of the United Methodist Structure**

In order to understand the “*Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation*,” it is helpful to be familiar with the basic structure of the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church is a global church. The legislative body that sets official policy and speaks for the denomination is the General Conference, which meets every four years. The General Conference is responsible for any changes to the Book of Discipline, the authoritative document of the United Methodist Church. The General Conference is made up of an equal number of clergy and laity from around the world.

Under the General Conference are Jurisdictional Conferences. There are five Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States. Kent UMC is part of the Western Jurisdictional Conference.

Under the Jurisdictional Conferences are Annual Conferences, and then Districts. Kent UMC is part of the SeaTac Missional District within the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. Our Annual Conference is served by Bishop Elaine Stanovsky.

The basic governing body within each United Methodist local church is called the charge conference.

#### **Who Are We at Kent UMC and How Did We Get Here?**

For over 25 years, the Reconciling Fellowship team at Kent UMC has ministered to the congregation through Bible studies, discussion groups, informational panels, and films concerning LGBTQIA persons. These events were organized to help us remember that God loves and accepts all people no matter what. The long-term goal was to be ready to becoming a Reconciling Congregation.

In February 2015, the Administrative Council approved the discernment process recommended by the Reconciling Fellowship team. Over the next year, several discussion groups were offered to the

congregation. In May 2016, the members of Kent United Methodist Church voted to become a Reconciling Congregation and adopted the following statement:

*“Kent United Methodist Church joyfully embraces God’s acceptance and love of all people. We affirm that all individuals are persons of sacred worth. We welcome the full participation in our church of everyone, without regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, education, marital circumstances, physical and mental abilities, economic status, theological perspective, political affiliation, and any other means people use to categorize or discriminate.”*

*“We are committed to discovering how we can most faithfully include, learn from, and grow with all people in our community.”*

The Administrative Council confirmed the decision by the members of Kent UMC and adopted the Reconciling Ministries rainbow flame to display on the reader board and in church communications, such as the website and brochures.



### **Brief History of Conversations on Human Sexuality in the Larger Church**

In 1972, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church began struggling with the issue of homosexuality in the denomination when they were asked for clarification of their statement that “homosexuals would have their human and civil rights ensured.” As a result of that first public debate, the following statement was added to The Book of Discipline: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

From there came a succession of additions to the United Methodist Book of Discipline between 1972 and 2019. These statements continued to reinforce the church’s stance against homosexuality.

In 2016, delegates deferred action on LGBTQ issues to the Commission on a Way Forward, and a special session of General Conference in 2019. During that special session, delegates adopted the “Traditionalist Plan” which affirmed the denomination’s teaching on homosexuality. It also hardened the denomination’s approach to rule breakers, closing loopholes that allowed some LGBTQ people to be ordained as clergy and some bishops to avoid enforcing the rules. It enacted new across-the-board standards for punishing ministers who perform same-sex weddings: a minimum one-year suspension without pay for the first wedding, and permanent removal from ministry for the second.

Now 47 years after the first General Conference debate, the United Methodist Church will gather this May in Minneapolis with the real possibility of separation over views of human sexuality.

Over these nearly five decades, our country and our culture (including the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association) have become more aware and more open. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court established same-sex marriage as a constitutional right, and 2 out of every 3 Americans agree.

However, the United Methodist Church is a global church. Just over half of all United Methodist membership is in the United States. Nearly half of all the remaining membership is in Africa, where homosexuality is criminalized in 38 of 54 countries.

### **The Upcoming General Conference and “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation”**

***The very groups that advocated for and supported the Traditionalist Plan that prevailed at the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference are the same groups who are now advocating that they be allowed to leave the global United Methodist Church.***

Four months after the Special Session of the General Conference, a group representing three differing viewpoints from the global church gathered in Chicago: traditionalists, centrists, and progressives. They worked with a famous mediator, Kenneth Feinberg (911 Victim Compensation Fund, Gulf Coast Claims Facility BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, appointed by both the Bush and Obama administrations). Because of his own Jewish faith and his interest in religion, Feinberg volunteered his time as mediator to help the group come to a resolution.

Their mediated solution recommends a graceful separation or split of the global United Methodist Church. There are several other proposals that will go before the General Conference in May. All but one plan calls for a separation within the larger church. The plan that is gathering the greatest support at this time seems to be the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation.” A few highlights of that plan:

- United Methodist churches continue just as they are after the separation.
- A new, Traditionalist Methodist denomination is formed.
- Other Methodist denominations can also be formed on or before May 15, 2021.
- Local churches can leave the United Methodist Church to join a new Methodist denomination with a 2/3 membership vote on or before December 31, 2024 and will keep their property, assets and liabilities.
- Churches that leave without joining a new Methodist denomination cannot keep their property or assets without paying for them.
- Annual Conferences can leave to join a new Methodist denomination with 57% majority vote on or before July 1, 2021
- \$2 million is set aside from existing UMC holdings to help start new Methodist denominations.
- \$25 million is paid over 4 years to the new Traditionalist Methodist denomination with no further claims to UMC holdings.
- \$39 million is paid over 8 years from existing UMC holdings to support ethic ministries and Africa University.
- Property, assets, and liabilities of Annual Conferences, Jurisdictional Conferences and Central Conferences are retained by those groups regardless of their affiliation.
- Pension plans for all current clergy and lay employees remain in place, regardless of affiliation.
- The United Methodist Church and new Methodist denominations may shape agreements to participate in agencies and mission activities (such as UMCOR, etc.)
- All administrative and judicial processes concerning Book of Discipline restrictions around homosexuality and closing churches would be paused until separation is complete.

- After the May General Conference, a Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church would be gathered to create regional conferences, remove current prohibitions against LGBTQ persons and those who act on their behalf, and to repeal the Traditional Plan.

At the same time this Protocol was developed, representatives from influential groups on all sides of the issue have become signatories and have promised to advocate with their constituents for this plan only, both before and during the General Conference in May. Many believe that the broad support this plan has among many of the different interest groups make it the front-runner to be adopted.

### **What Happens After the General Conference?**

So, what does this all mean for our church? What will happen to the Kent UMC? The simple answer is: Nothing!

While it is likely that some churches, annual conferences, and jurisdictions will be leaving the United Methodist Church to form more traditional or conservative Methodist denominations, that is not certain at this time. It is also likely that the official position of the United Methodist Church will soon be coming into alignment with the larger openness and inclusivity of our church and North American culture, but that is also not certain at this time.

We will have to wait for specifics until after General Conference. We will gather a Town Hall meeting and share information with you, likely in June.

Please be rest assured, regardless of the actions at General Conference, Kent United Methodist Church will continue to be a Bible-based, Jesus-centered, totally inclusive and wonderfully diverse United Methodist Church focused on loving God and loving our neighbors.